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ABSTRACT

This study examined kindergarten teachers' perceptions regarding the change in schedule from an everyday, half-day program to an alternating day, full-day program. Subjects included 37 female teachers in a small midwestern city who had almost completed the first year of the changed schedule. Results from a mail survey revealed teacher concerns, including: (1) poorer children's social skills because of increased fatigue, irritability, and aggression; (2) lengthened adjustment for students with separation anxiety; (3) decreased children's social and academic competence and increased stress level; (4) lack of school meals for disadvantaged children and negative role models in the lunch room; and (5) problems in meeting needs of children who were disadvantaged or who had special needs because of lack of consistency, routine, repetition, and continuity. Most teachers reported fatigue and irritability because of dealing with the same group of children all day, lack of planning time, and inconsistent scheduling of special activities. They believed that although parents liked the ease of transportation, some parents were confused by the schedule. Teachers thought that communication with parents was more difficult. In the classroom, teachers found they had more time for extended projects, play and self-directed activities; however, they gave up traditional calendar activities, increased review time, and found that theme units disintegrated. Teachers perceived a decrease in busing expenditures. Results suggest that the scheduling change was not in the best interest of children in this district. Recommendations for school districts were also drawn from the results, including recognizing children's needs, supporting teachers, and keeping parents informed. Recommendations for future research include drawing comparative data from matched groups in other schedules and rural and urban comparisons. (Contains 25 references.) (KDFB)

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Teachers' Perceptions of the All-Day, Alternating Day Kindergarten Schedule

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Review of the Literature	2
Contrasting Half-Day, Everyday to All-Day, Alternating Day Schedules	2
Teacher Judgments	3
Method	8
Subjects	8
Instrument	9
Procedures	10
Results	10
Teachers' Behaviors	10
Children's Behaviors	12
Parents' Behaviors	14
Lunch at School	14
Children with Special Needs	15
Disadvantaged Children	16
Time in School	17
Academic Skills	18
Social Skills	19
Teaching Practices	21
Parent Involvement	23
Benefits and Deficits of the Alternating Day Schedule	24
Benefits and Deficits of the Half-Day, Everyday Schedule	25
Other Comments	26
Perspective of a Teacher who has been teaching in an alternate day program for many years	27
Summary	28
Effects for Children	28
Effects for Teachers	31
Effects for Parents	32
Effects for Administrators	32
Effects for the Curriculum	33
Recommendations	34
Recommendations for School Districts	34
Recommendations for Future Research	37
Conclusions	39
References	40

Teachers Perceptions of the All-Day, Alternating Day Kindergarten Schedule

The full-day, alternating day kindergarten schedule is an option for school districts that see monetary savings as an outcome of moving to this schedule. Instead of providing bussing for two groups of young children to attend traditional half-day kindergarten sessions, the district can eliminate the mid-day bus runs by having children attend school full-time on an every-other-day basis. However, is the alternating day schedule in the best interests of children? Educational decisions, such as scheduling, must be based on a variety of factors, not just the monetary savings. Administrators need to consider academic outcomes, social outcomes, teachers' concerns, parental concerns, curricular concerns, and how these outcomes and concerns relate to kindergarten goals.

This study examines how teachers in one small midwestern city perceive the effects of the change in kindergarten schedule from an everyday, half-day program to an alternating day, full-day program.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Contrasting Half-Day, Everyday to All-Day, Alternating Day Schedules

The literature reflects studies that contrast half-day, everyday programs to all-day, alternating programs (Bickers, 1989; Cleminshaw and Guidubaldi, 1979; Finkelstein, 1983; Gullo, 1990; Gullo and Clements, 1984; Jalongo, 1986; Moncada, 1986; Robertson, 1984; Sheehan, Cryan, Wiechel, and Bandy, 1991; Tephly, 1985; Ulrey, Alexander, Bender, and Gillis,1982). Issues of concern related to the two schedules include: academic achievement, social skills development, children's energy levels, equality of attendance levels between groups, program continuity, parental needs, clarity of the alternating-day schedule, and curriculum.

Bickers (1989) reviewed fourteen studies from 1972-1987 that compared alternate day and half-day kindergarten schedules. He concluded that there were no differences related to academic benefits of either schedule. He reported that five studies found no significant differences for advantaged children, three studies favored alternate day schedules related to significant academic differences among advantaged children, and one study favored alternate day programs for disadvantaged pupils. It was reported that three studies found children to benefit most under the half-day schedule. Bickers reported that five studies found no significant

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differences between the two schedules for pupils when it came to behavior and attitude toward school. However, three studies favored social competency outcomes for the alternate day pupils. Bickers reported that kindergarten teachers, principals, and parents preferred the alternate day schedule over the half-day schedule.

Tephly (1985) was concerned with children's retention as a result of kindergarten scheduling. She found that young children do forget and that the amount of forgetting increases with time. She warns that teachers who work in alternate-day schedules may need to spend time re-teaching.

Teacher Judgments

It is well documented in the literature that teachers are very good judges of academic achievement and social competence. Teacher judgments of academic performance have been documented in studies by Egan and Archer, 1985; Helmke and Schrader, 1987; Hoge, 1983; Hoge, 1984; Hoge, 1989; Hoge and Butcher, 1984; Hopkins, George, and Williams, 1985; Kenoyer, 1982; Keogh and Smith, 1970; Perry, Guidubaldi, and Kehle, 1979; and Stoner and Purcell, 1985. Teacher ratings were related to the predictive accuracy of the Bender Gestalt for the early identification of educationally high potential or high risk children (Keogh and Smith, 1970). Third grade behavior and achievement as predicted by an IQ test, an

achievement test, and teacher ratings of academic competence and social competence in kindergarten were studied by Perry, Guidubaldi, and Kehle (1979). While kindergarten math achievement scores were the best predictor of third-grade reading scores, the addition of teacher ratings of academic competence increased the prediction of reading by 8%. Teacher ratings of affective social characteristics and specific academic measures had equal or higher predictive values than a global measure of aptitude. In Hoge's (1983) review of research related to teacher judgment, he concluded that there is a high level of concurrent and predictive validity between teacher judgments and achievement scores. Egan and Archer (1985) found that teacher ratings were basically accurate predictors of performance. Additionally, teachers' predictions are respected with regards to future special education placement (Becker and Snider, 1979), school readiness (Fitzgerald, 1984), and success in first grade (Bolig and Fletcher, 1973).

There are at least four studies related to the full-day, alternating-day schedule that sought teacher perceptions. Finkelstein (1983) surveyed teachers and administrators about their perceptions of benefits and deficits of the full-day, alternating day and the half-day, everyday schedules. She reports that teachers list more time for long projects and

7 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

field trips, more time with students, and greater continuity during a day as benefits of the full day, alternating schedule. However, she reports that teachers find it difficult to deal with short attention spans, spend more time on review and reteaching, have difficulty providing continuity and keeping groups together, experience less actual teaching time, and find programming difficult in the full-day alternating-day schedule. This same study reports that teachers in the half-day, everyday program report that planning is easier and that there is greater continuity in planning, that they experience more flexibility in scheduling, and that the teacher knows the children better because the children are seen everyday. The teachers report that the day isn't long enough, that they have less time to get to know the children, that they must repeat the same thing twice in a day, and that it is difficult to keep the time equal between the two daily kindergarten groups in the half-day, everyday schedule. Teachers from both full-day, alternating day and half-day, everyday kindergarten schedules preferred the half-day, everyday schedule.

This same study (Finkelstein, 1983) reported that when teachers and administrators were asked about how children were effected under the two schedules, they reported that children in the half-day, everyday schedule were more alert, attentive, and had better retention of learning.

They felt that the half-day, everyday program better met the needs of children because the length of time in school was best suited to the kindergarten child's age. These same teachers and administrators felt that the full-day, alternating day schedule helped with the transition to first grade, allowed more structured time for long projects, and provided a better environment for children from poor home environments. However, they also felt that the day was too long for some children and some teachers, that immature children couldn't cope, that the first few weeks were difficult, that there was a lack of continuity, and that there was prolonged absence from school when days were missed for illness or snow days.

When teachers and administrators in the Finkelstein (1983) study were asked about outcomes for the family, they reported that following the schedule was difficult, that scheduling babysitting was difficult, that children came home exhausted from school, and that children were bored on their days off under the alternating day schedule. With regards to impacts on the family under the half-day, everyday schedule, they felt that the child was less tired and happier in school, that the family was certain about days and times the child was to attend school, that the child had more time each day to spend with the family, and that the transition

9 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

to school was easier. However, teachers and administrators felt that this schedule tied the family down more, made babysitting more difficult, and caused midday transportation to be a concern.

Teachers in a study conducted by Gullo and Clements (1984) perceived alternating-day students to have more difficulty adjusting to school, to not seem to know each others' names as early in the year, to have more trouble developing out-of-school interactions, and to be less motivated and enthused. Teachers in this study also reported that students were more fatigued in the all-day alternating day program. Teachers felt that more review time was necessary, that afternoon instructional time was minimal, and that there were fewer creative and fun activities in the alternating day program. However, teachers preferred the alternate-day approach to scheduling because they only had one group of children each day and they didn't have to do the same thing twice in one day.

Jalongo (1986) noted that the teachers find the continuity of the program difficult to maintain in an alternating day program, but that the disadvantaged children derived more benefits from the all-day, alternating day program.

Robertson (1984) reports that teachers did not like the full-day

schedule because they needed to spend more time reviewing lessons when there were long lapses between classes. Also children's friendships were jeopardized because it took longer for friendships to develop in the alternating day situation. Another cause for concern was that children had difficulty adjusting to their first school experience and often burst into tears of frustration when they became confused by the alternating day schedule. They also reported that the afternoon was not a very productive time because students spent much of that time with specials like music or physical education and there was little time for pre-reading activities in the afternoon. Also, children were not as attentive in the afternoon.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects in this study consisted of thirty-seven kindergarten teachers employed in a school district in a small midwestern city during the 1995-1996 school year. All the subjects were female. This was the first year of change from the half-day, everyday kindergarten schedule to a full-day, alternating day schedule. Kindergarten groups met on Monday, Wednesday, and alternating Fridays or on Tuesday, Thursday, and alternating Fridays.

A comparison group of three female kindergarten teachers from a neighboring rural school district who had been implementing the full-day, alternating day schedule for many years was also established.

Instrument

A thirty-six question survey questionnaire was developed by the author based on the findings of previous studies. Teachers were asked to report their perceptions of the change in scheduling from the half-day, everyday schedule to the full-day, alternating day schedule. Open-ended questions related to changes in teachers' behaviors, children's behaviors, and parents' behaviors. Teachers were asked open-ended questions about the benefits or deficits of: eating lunch at school, meeting the needs of children with special needs, and meeting the needs of disadvantaged children. Twenty-five questions used a five-point likert scale to assess changes in behaviors. Teachers were asked five more open-ended questions: what was the greatest benefit of the alternating day schedule, what was the greatest deficit of the alternating day schedule, what they missed the most about the half-day, everyday schedule, what they missed the least about the half-day, everyday schedule, and what else they wanted the experimenter to know about this topic.

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Procedures

In early April, 1996, permissions to conduct the study were obtained. A cover letter and a survey were mailed to each of the thirty-seven kindergarten teachers from the midwestern city and the three kindergarten teachers from the neighboring rural district in mid-April, 1996. A stamped, self-addressed envelope was enclosed. Subjects were asked to respond anonymously by May 3, 1996.

RESULTS

Responses were received from sixteen of the thirty-seven city kindergarten teachers which represents a return rate of 43%. Only one of the three kindergarten teachers from the rural district responded, representing a 33% return rate. However, the rural kindergarten teacher did not complete the questionnaire. Instead she wrote one page of comments about her perceptions of the all-day, alternating day schedule.

Teachers' Behaviors

With regards to changes in teacher behaviors between the alternate day and half-day schedules, teachers self-reported personal, planning, and curriculum concerns. Personally, teachers felt more tired and crabby when having to work with the same group of children for the whole day. Conversely, they reported that they felt more fresh and energetic when

seeing two groups of children each day.

When it came to planning, the kindergarten teachers frustrations were illustrated with comments about having three specials in one day on one of the full-days and no specials the next day which resulted in inconsistency in routine. They felt that the half-day program was more balanced with one special per day per group so that similar schedules could be followed from one day to the next. While one teacher felt that she had more time to prepare in the alternating day program, another teacher felt that she had more time to plan and less time to babysit in the half-day program. It was reported that unit planning was more difficult in the alternate day schedule; one teacher said that it was more of a "teach for the day" planning process with no building up of a unit that ended in a culminating event. However, less "special" activities and shorter activities were emphasized in the half-day program. Teachers reported feeling hurried in the half-day programs and worried about time schedules.

With regards to curriculum, the teachers in the alternate day schedule reported that they taught academic subjects like reading and math primarily in the morning and planned for more active learning in the afternoons. However, there was concern expressed that children did not

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receive as much reading instruction or math instruction in the alternate-day schedule. They felt that they needed to review in the afternoon because children might not hear the information again for 2-4 days. The alternate day schedule did allow for more choosing time and more time to listen to and watch the children. One of the teachers reported being excited about the opportunities for in depth study to better meet student needs in the alternate day schedule. Another teacher reported that a project could be started in the morning and finished in the afternoon in the alternate day schedule. However, several teachers commented that they felt that they could offer more "structured" activities in the half-day program as is illustrated by the following quote: "I feel my teaching was more continuous, more productive, and more satisfying (in the half-day schedule). Now I often feel we make progress very slowly." A concern about the use of the calendar as part of the curriculum was expressed. Previously calendar time had been a part of the daily routine in the half-day schedule and many math concepts were taught during that time. Now the calendar became meaningless because of the alternating days.

Children's Behaviors

Regarding changes in children's behaviors between the two schedules, there were many more negative comments from teachers with

regards to the alternate day schedule. Teachers overwhelmingly reported tired, crabby children who often slept in the afternoon. Teachers reported that children were much more aggressive, and particularly noted increases in negative behaviors by the afternoon. Teachers needed to frequently review classroom rules and expectations with the children. Decreases in children's attention spans, difficulty adjusting to the routine, and frequent questions about when they would be in school were other behaviors that the teachers observed. Teachers also reported that children exhibited more separation problems and more immature behaviors (like thumb-sucking and tears) under the alternating day schedule. A positive change mentioned under the alternate day schedule was the addition of recess time. One teacher reported that the children were reading and writing more under the alternate day schedule and participating in more project work.

Teachers reported that under the half-day schedule children had more energy and were more enthusiastic learners, children were more comfortable with the schedule, children felt more ownership of the classroom, and that children were more conscious of the rules and therefore exhibited less misbehavior. Teachers also reported that under the half-day schedule, children had less problems with separation anxiety.

Parents' Behaviors

Teachers report that parents were confused by the alternating day schedule and complained that the children had too many days off. Although volunteerism was not effected, written communication with parents became more difficult under the alternating day schedule. One teacher wrote: "requires advanced planning to get communication with parents in time for events. Also takes much longer to get notes back. Not much immediate feedback." One teacher reported that parents were concerned about their children's sleep/wake schedule because the alternating day schedule led to variations in the children's daily patterns of activity. Teachers felt that they had closer contact with parents and had better communication with parents under the half-day schedule. However, three of the teachers felt that there was no difference in their relationships with parents between the two schedules. One teacher commented that it was difficult in the half-day schedule for parents to pick up children at 10:30 A.M.

Lunch at School

One of the added activities under the alternating day schedule was that of eating lunch at school. Teachers were asked what the benefits and deficits were for kindergarten children to eat lunch at school. One of the

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prominent responses was that eating lunch at school eased the transition to first grade. It was seen as a benefit to children considered to be at-risk because they ate a balanced, nutritional meal at school two or three days each week. It was seen as a social time, a time to build community, but it was also seen as a time when negative lunchroom behaviors were modeled by other classes. One teacher saw this as an opportunity to teach self-help skills, while another teacher saw it as stressful to open milk cartons for large numbers of children. Seven of the sixteen teachers (44%) mentioned that children rushed to eat, didn't eat, or threw out food so that they could go to recess. Only one teacher mentioned that dealing with lunch tickets was a hassle.

Children with Special Needs

Teachers were asked if they felt that the alternating-day schedule was a benefit to children with special needs. Only one teacher out of the sixteen respondents (6%) felt that the child with special needs benefitted from the alternate day schedule; however, this child attended daily rather than on alternating days. She commented that one student with special needs attended all day everyday in her class with a small class size. She felt that this child had made important gains. The other fifteen teachers (94%) felt that children with special needs did not benefit from the

alternate day schedule. Two-thirds of these teachers cited consistency, repetition, and routine as critical to the learning needs of a child with special needs; they felt these were lacking in the alternate-day schedule. One third of these teachers reported that children with special needs were removed from their classrooms for special services. One teacher commented that resource times were squeezed into two days instead of being distributed over a five-day school week. Another teacher commented: "Therapy and resource schedules were not accommodated on a daily basis. Because of scheduling, a child had one hour of speech in one day. This is not appropriate for a 5-6 year old."

Disadvantaged Children

One teacher (6%) felt that disadvantaged children benefitted from the alternating day program because these children were provided with lunch. One teacher (6%) did not respond to this question. The other fourteen teachers (87.5%) felt that disadvantaged children did not benefit from the alternate day schedule. Although many of these teachers saw the benefit of eating meals at school, they also wondered if the children were fed appropriately on the alternating days when they were not in school. Problems with the alternating day schedule for disadvantaged children were the lack of consistency, continuity, and routine in their lives and the

fact that disadvantaged children are not likely to be stimulated at home or provided with activities that reinforce what is being taught in school. Teachers felt that the days off of school were probably unstructured for disadvantaged children. One teacher wrote: "A lot of time, I (school) am their only positive (encouraging) part of their life. It would benefit them to be at school everyday. They don't get daily interaction with educational activities." Another teacher wrote: "In areas where there are many disadvantaged children it is important for a teacher to see children every day to be sure their needs (physical, emotional) are being met...in cases of suspected abuse, etc..."

Time in school

Teachers were asked to respond to questions about how time was spent in school under the alternate-day schedule in comparison to the previous half-day, everyday schedule. A five-point likert scale that used a continuum of much more time, more time, the same amount of time, less time, and much less time was provided. Results were as follows:

66.7% felt that less time or much less time was spent on academics.

74.1% felt that more time was available for play.

93.3% felt that time for specials like music, art, and physical education remained the same under both schedules.

46.7% felt that more time or much more time was available for extended activities like projects under the alternating day schedule, while 26.7% felt that the same amount of time and 26.7% felt that less time was available.

While 53.3% felt that the time to participate in school activities like field trips, colloquiums, and special events remained the same under both schedules, 33.4% felt that more or much more time was available and 13.3% felt that less time was available.

42.9% felt that the time remained the same for self-directed activities while 42.8% felt that more or much more time was available for self-directed activities. Only 14.3% felt that less time was available for self-selected activities.

Review time needed was seen to have increased or greatly increased by 80% of the teachers under the alternate day schedule, while 13.3% saw review time as remaining the same under both schedules. Only 6.7% (1 teacher) saw review time as being greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule.

Academic Skills

Teachers were asked to respond to a few questions related to academic skills. They were to select a response using a five-point likert

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scale that assessed if academic skills had greatly increased, increased, remained the same, decreased, or greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule compared to the previous half-day, everyday schedule. Results were as follows:

While 31.6% of the teachers saw children's academic competence as remaining the same under both schedules, 52.7% felt that children's academic competence had decreased or greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule. 15.8% felt that children's academic competence had increased or greatly increased under the alternate day schedule.

70.6% of the teachers felt that children's retention of concepts had decreased or greatly decreased. 17.6% felt that concept retention remained the same, while 11.8% felt that retention of concepts had increased under the alternate day schedule.

While 46.7% of the teachers felt that children's motivation for learning remained the same, 40% felt that children's motivation for learning had decreased. Two of the teachers (13.4%) reported that children's motivation for learning had increased or greatly increased.

Social Skills

Teachers were asked to evaluate a variety of social skills using a five-point likert scale that assessed whether children's skills had greatly

increased, increased, remained the same, decreased, or greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule. Results were as follows:

While 18.8% of the teachers felt that children's social competence had increased or greatly increased, 25% felt that children's social competence had remained the same. However, 56.3% felt that children's social competence had decreased under the alternate day schedule.

Regarding children's friendships, 58.8% of the teachers felt that friendships remained the same, while 11.8% felt that friendships had increased or greatly increased. 29.4% felt that children's friendships had decreased under the alternate day schedule.

When asked about children's comfort level, 56.3% of the teachers felt that children's comfort level had decreased, while 31.3% felt that it remained the same and 12.6% felt that it had increased or greatly increased under the alternate day schedule.

66.7% of the teachers perceived that children's stress level had increased; 26.7% felt that it had remained the same; and 6.7% felt that it had decreased under the alternate day schedule.

Cooperation was perceived as being the same with 62.5% of the teachers; 31.3% felt that cooperation had decreased; and 6.3% felt that it had increased under the alternate day schedule.

80% of the teachers felt that competition among the children remained the same, but 20% felt that it had increased under the alternate day program.

With regards to separation anxiety at the beginning of the school year, 58.8% of the teachers felt that there was much more separation anxiety and 29.4% felt that there was more separation anxiety under the alternate day schedule. 11.8% felt that it was the same under the alternate day program as it had been under the half-day, everyday schedule.

When teachers were asked about how they felt children experienced "ownership" of the room, 53.3% stated that "ownership" remained the same under both schedules. However, 40% felt that children's "ownership" had decreased and one teacher (6.7%) felt that it had increased under the alternate day schedule.

Teaching Practices

Teachers were asked to select appropriate responses to a variety of questions related to teaching practices. A five point likert scale allowed teachers to select whether their practices had greatly increased, increased, remained the same, decreased or greatly decreased. Results are as follows:

With regards to teacher preparation time under the alternate day schedule, 56.3% of the teachers reported that teacher preparation time had decreased or greatly decreased. 31.3% felt that teacher preparation time had increased or greatly increased, and 12.5% felt that it had remained the same.

When teachers were asked about collaboration with other teachers, 62.5% reported that collaboration had decreased or greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule. 37.5% of the teachers felt that collaboration remained the same under both schedules.

81.3% of the teachers report that continuity in programming had decreased or greatly decreased. Only two teachers (12.5%) felt that it remained the same and only 1 teacher (6.3%) felt that continuity had increased under the alternate day program.

When asked about retentions, 50% of the teachers felt that retentions would remain the same. 33.3% felt that there would be more retentions and 16.7% felt that there would be less retentions. Two of the teachers wrote in additional comments to this question. One teacher wrote: "We don't retain but more children have been referred and qualify for the resource room." Another teacher wrote: "We don't retain. If we did, I would have more retentions this year."

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Parent Involvement

Teachers were asked to respond to three questions related to parent involvement. They could choose a response from a five-point likert scale that presented a continuum from greatly increased, to increased, to remained the same, to decreased, to greatly decreased. Results are as follows:

56.3% of the teachers responded that teacher/parent communication had remained the same, while 37.6% reported that teacher/parent communication had decreased or greatly decreased. Only one teacher (6.3%) reported an increase in the amount of teacher/parent communication under the alternate day schedule.

With regards to parent volunteerism, 56.3% of the teachers reported that it remained the same. 31.3% state that parent volunteerism decreased or greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule, while 12.6% felt that it had increased or greatly increased.

When asked about parental concerns, over half the teachers (50.1%) reported that parental concerns had increased or greatly increased. 43.8% reported that parental concerns remained the same and only one teacher (6.3%) felt that parental concerns had greatly decreased under the alternate day schedule.

Benefits and Deficits of the Alternating Day Schedule

Teachers were asked an open-ended question about the benefits of the alternating day schedule. Two teachers saw the alternate day schedule allowing them more time for field trips and extensive projects. One teacher felt that the alternate day schedule allowed her more time to get to know the children better. Free play time, lunch at school, the opportunity to set out materials for instruction, and the fact that the alternate day program may benefit working parents were mentioned. One itinerant teacher felt that this schedule made her life easier since she could be in a school for a whole day without traveling to a second site. One teacher felt that there were no benefits to the alternate day schedule. The most reported benefit was cited by three teachers (18.8%) who stated that the school district saved money related to bussing. These benefits were seen to effect the school district budget, the teachers, the parents, and the children.

Teachers were asked an open-ended question about the deficits of the alternating day schedule. Seven of the teachers (43.8%) reported loss of continuity and six teachers (37.5%) reported lack of consistency as deficits of the alternating day schedule. Two teachers reported the increase in behavior problems and two other teachers reported the long

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breaks as deficits. Other deficits noted by teachers included the disintegration of theme units, less time for teaching, and the confusing schedule. Most of these deficits seemed to fall on the children or the curriculum.

Benefits and Deficits of the Half-Day, Everyday Schedule

Over half of the teachers (56.3%) reported that seeing the children daily so that they could observe their learning styles and work habits was a benefit of the half-day schedule. 18.75% of the teachers reported consistency, continuity, and meaningful calendar activities as benefits of the half-day schedule. Two teachers reported that a benefit of the half-day schedule was seeing children's excitement and anticipation with regards to the theme units; two other teachers felt that the planning time between sessions was a benefit. One teacher reported the contentment of the children in the half-day program as a benefit. Another teacher reported that she felt happy to see a different group of children after lunch. Most of these benefits related to children.

Deficits of the half-day scheduling included feeling hurried in a short 2 1/2 hour program daily, being bothered with sending home papers twice a day, duplicating the opening exercises twice a day, having room parties twice in one day, having outside duty time, and having to split up

projects because they couldn't be completed in one day. It should be noted that these deficits relate more to teachers than to children.

Other Comments

Teachers were given an opportunity to express anything else that they wanted the researcher to know about this topic. The most frequent response (37.5%) to this open-ended question was that teachers felt that the alternating day schedule was not in the best interest of children. A teacher stated: "Yes, kids and adults do adapt, but why should we adapt to what is not in the best interests of the child?" Another teacher stated: "Alternating day kindergarten is not doing what is best for the learning, growing, fragile child!" Two teachers expressed a concern that there was less instructional time under the full-day, alternating day schedule because there were three recesses. As one teacher put it: "We have much less instructional time with students due to all the transitions i.e. boots and coats on and off for 3 recesses." Two teachers were concerned about attendance under the alternating day schedule. Other comments made concerned the confusing schedule, discipline concerns, and the feeling that children with greater needs were being hurt by this new schedule. One teacher stated that this was a "bad idea". Another teacher said: "The biggest fallacy is that you can put two half days of teaching into one day!

Their attention span prohibits this!" Another teacher wrote: "If we are looking at what is more appropriate for five- and six-year-olds, we need a half-day program. If money, parental convenience, and bus issues were removed from this situation we would not be seeing this change." The only positive comment was that this was a good schedule for a part-time teacher. Another teacher stated: "I think this schedule is great for teachers but not great for students."

Perspective of a teacher who has been teaching in an alternate day program for many years

One teacher from a neighboring school district that has been implementing the all-day, alternate day schedule for many years wrote a response. She felt very positively about this schedule. She stated: "I think that full day kindergarten is a wonderful schedule. It benefits the students and also the parents who often have scheduling problems if they are employed. The students have more time in the classroom and therefore more learning can take place." She does admit that fall is the hardest for the little ones because of full day schedule, but she states that kindergarten teachers need to adapt their programming and activities to meet the developmental needs of the children.

She feels that teachers get to know the whole child better in the

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alternating day schedule. She reports that the availability of lunch allows children to experience new foods and will aid in the transition to first grade. Although she admits that teacher preparation time is reduced under the full-day, alternating day schedule, she feels that preparation time is comparable to other elementary teachers.

SUMMARY

The change in the kindergarten schedule to an all-day, alternating day schedule has effected children, teachers, parents, administrators, and the curriculum. The scheduling of specials (like art, music, physical education, and library) and the scheduling of services for children with special needs have also been effected. The questions are: Which of these effects are positive? Which are negative? and, Which can be ameliorated? This study has used the teacher as a lens to observe the effects of this change. Because many of the judgments that the kindergarten teachers in this small midwestern city have made are similar to the results of previous research, there is validity to what these teachers have observed and reported.

Effects for Children

Teachers were more concerned about children's social skills in the alternate day schedule. Teachers have observed children who are fatigued

by afternoon; that fatigue leads to increased irritability and aggression coupled with a loss of attention. Teachers perceive a lengthened adjustment period for students who have difficulty with separation anxiety; teachers report regressive, baby-like behaviors for these children. Teachers felt that children's social competence had decreased, that children's comfort level had decreased, and that children's stress level had increased. None of these behaviors and feelings are conducive to learning or to creating positive learning dispositions. There was some concern that cooperation had decreased and competition had increased.

Children's academic competence was perceived to be decreasing under the alternate day schedule. Teachers were also concerned that concept retention was declining under the alternate day schedule. Children's motivation for learning was also a concern.

Eating lunch at school was viewed as both positive and negative. It was positive because children were given nutritious meals when in school. However, many children rushed through their meals and did not consume them because they were hurrying to go outside to play. Disadvantaged children got nutritious meals on the days that they were in school, but it was feared that they may only receive nutritious meals on an alternating day basis. Older children in the lunchrooms provided negative role models

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at times. Although it was noted that participating in the full day program and having lunch at school would aid with the transition to first grade, shouldn't kindergarten children be focused on being successful in kindergarten rather than getting ready for the next year?

There are major concerns about meeting the needs of children who are disadvantaged or who have special needs. Lack of consistency, routine, repetition, and continuity concerned the teachers. Not being able to observe endangered children daily made teachers question if they were meeting the social/emotional needs and physical safety needs of some of these children. Children in the alternating day schedule were over-stimulated one day and under-stimulated the next. Provision of special services were crammed into two days per week with therapy sessions that were inappropriately extended instead of being distributed in shorter increments over more time. Additionally teachers reported that there were more referrals for special services and that they felt more children would benefit from retention. If a school district does not meet children's needs early in their school careers, the result will be an increase in amelioration services later on---at a greater financial cost to the district and a greater academic and social cost to the children.

Effects for Teachers

Most of the teachers reported being tired and crabby by the afternoon. It appeared that being with the same group of young children for a full day with the additional responsibilities of dressing/undressing children for recess three times per day, of collecting lunch money and assisting with lunches, of coping with tired children in the afternoon, and of adjusting curriculum to the new schedule were quite stressful for teachers in this transition year. The inconsistency of the scheduling of specials from one day to the next led to more stress because of the unbalanced schedule. Also the unevenness of the schedule (seeing one group three days in one week and the other group two days in one week), left the teachers with the challenge of how to balance out the curriculum for both groups.

It seems that the teachers needed more planning time to adjust to curricular changes, but their planning time was diminished under this new schedule.

Although not directly reported by the teachers, there seems to be an underlying assumption that moving to the alternating day schedule was a form of restructuring rather than an opportunity for transformation of the curriculum. Teachers reported frustration at not being able to fit what

they had previously done in two half days into a full day schedule. Perhaps the issue is not "fitting" things in, but making some real changes.

Effects for Parents

The kindergarten teachers reported that parents who transported their children to/from school seemed to like the alternating day schedule better because they did not have to cope with mid-day transportation needs. However, teachers reported that parents were confused by the schedule.

One of the concerns that was brought up to a teacher by a parent was that the child's wake/sleep schedule was so different from one day to the next.

The kindergarten teachers reported that communication with parents became more difficult under the alternating day schedule.

Effects for Administrators

The kindergarten teachers perceived the major positive effect for administrators to be a decrease in expenditures for bussing. This budget savings was certainly a major motivator for instituting this change.

Another effect of the change for administrators has been with regards to scheduling the special classes.

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Effects for the Curriculum

There were some positive curricular changes. For example, children could engage in extended projects; children could begin a project in the morning and complete it by the afternoon. Additionally, there was more time for play and more time for self-directed activities. More and more research discusses the benefits of both play and choice for children. Teachers reported that there was less time for academics under the alternating day schedule; this may be a positive effect that is more developmentally appropriate.

Teachers reported that they had to give up their traditional calendar activities because they were no longer meaningful on an every other day basis.

Teachers also report the disintegration of theme units. It is extremely difficult for teachers to program for two groups that are heterogeneous because of diversity in schedules of attendance.

Teachers also reported that they felt that they needed to teach reading and mathematics in the mornings with a review in the afternoons. Teachers also reported an increase in review time. The need for repetition in an alternating day schedule is documented in the literature (Tephly, 1985). However, one teacher reported that the children in her

classes were reading and writing more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for School Districts

The results of this study indicate that teachers prefer the everyday, half-day schedule in this school district. Their observations of children's behaviors, their own behaviors, and curriculum changes indicate that the full-day, alternating day schedule is not, for the most part, benefiting the children of this small midwestern city. In order to assure that kindergarten will benefit young children under the alternating day schedule, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Children's needs should to be recognized. Children need regular schedules between home and school. Under the full-day, alternating day schedule, some children may require rest time at school---at least during the fall. More emphasis may need to be placed on a social/emotional curriculum. Children who are disadvantaged or who have special needs may need to attend school daily. Children's social and academic progress needs to be monitored over time.

2. Teachers need support when they undergo such a change in schedules. Support can be offered through workshops, through support groups, or with additional planning time. Parent volunteers could assist teachers with

the additional responsibilities that teachers face in meeting the physical needs of children during recess and lunch. Positive role models could be identified either within the school district or outside of it so that teachers can observe how they might adapt.

3. Parents need to be involved and informed. The full-day, alternating day schedule requires that new strategies for communication be developed. It should be emphasized to parents that they can serve as partners to the teachers if they will maintain similar wake/sleep schedules at home as are instituted in school. Parents need to be systematically surveyed at different points throughout the school year so that their needs can be ascertained and met.

4. Administrators need to be supportive of kindergarten teachers. They can plan support group meetings for teachers, they can plan workshops, they can work on the schedules of the specialists to more evenly distribute services to the kindergartens, and they can work with the special education staff so that children with special needs are better served. Administrators can adjust the alternating day schedule for more balance. For example, the Monday, Wednesday, alternating Fridays schedule for one group and the Tuesday, Thursday, alternating Friday schedule for the second group is not as equitable as other alternating day

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schedules. For example, a Monday, alternating Wednesday, Thursday schedule for one group and a Tuesday, alternating Wednesday, Friday schedule for a second group more evenly distributes learning gaps between the two groups. Another schedule that is more equitable is to have one group attend Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Tuesday, Thursday and have a second group attend Tuesday, Thursday, Monday, Wednesday, Friday in a two-week rotation schedule. Of course, the other alternative is to have administrators be willing to change back to the half day, everyday schedule.

5. The curriculum may need to be transformed so that there is less emphasis on academics, more emphasis on play and choice, and more engagement of children in projects. New themes or units may need to be developed that revolve around a two-week cycle. Or a totally different approach may evolve for the curriculum delivery---a project approach or an emergent curriculum approach. Repetition will need to be viewed as a necessary component of the curriculum.

6. After a trial period of two or more years, and after data have been gathered from teachers, from parents, from children, and through observation, the decisions about scheduling should be reviewed again. Robertson (1984) reports that the Aurora, Ohio school district returned to

the half-day schedule after two years of implementing an alternating day program. Robertson stated: "there is more to be considered in changing a proven system than statistical data." (Robertson, 1984, p. 23). "Although our study indicated that students performed equally well and achieved similar social development under either schedule, we made the decision to revert back to the half-day, every day arrangement. In the end, it was the feelings of both parents and teachers that made the difference." (Robertson, 1984, p. 24)

Recommendations for Future Research

This was a very limited study. Kindergarten teachers perceptions represent only one aspect of a change in kindergarten schedules. In order to fully evaluate such a change, data needs to be collected from a variety of sources for a within-group analysis. For example, teachers might be surveyed prior to the change and at annual intervals after the change. Teachers' perceptions could be further validated by classroom observations at different times of the day over different parts of the kindergarten year. Longitudinal data related to both academic and social competence of the children could be gathered annually at least until the children complete third grade. Parents could be directly surveyed to gather their perceptions of this schedule. Administrators could

contribute data related to financial savings, retention rates, and referrals to special services. Curricular reviews could be conducted to determine how the alternate-day schedule effects the curriculum.

Comparative data might be gathered from matched groups that are participating in other schedules to make some between-group comparisons. For example, there might be a comparison made between matched groups that are newly implementing an alternate-day program with ones that have had many years of implementing such a schedule. Or comparisons might be made between groups participating in half-day, everyday schedules, full-day, alternating day schedules, and full-day, everyday schedules. There is also the possibility of comparing groups across a variety of alternating-day schedules.

Rural/urban comparisons could also be made. Effects for differing populations (children who had a great deal of preschool experience, children who had no preschool experience, children who stayed home prior to kindergarten entry, children who attended childcare programs prior to entering kindergarten, children with special needs, disadvantaged children, children considered to be "at-risk", or "typical" children) could be observed.

CONCLUSIONS

The decision to change from consistent daily programming through a half-day, everyday kindergarten schedule to a full-day, alternating day schedule does not appear to be in the best interests of children in this particular school district. The alternating day schedule may enhance kindergarten goals such as giving children time to socialize, allowing children opportunities to work in groups, and enhancing young children's development through play. However, other kindergarten goals such as relating positively to peers and building positive dispositions toward school and learning are not fostered when children experience fatigue which leads to inattentiveness, irritability, and aggression. Inequity of the schedules can result in less retention of concepts for one of the alternating groups due to scheduled learning gaps. Children who are disadvantaged or who have special needs may require daily programming.

School district administrators who face the scheduling decision must take all factors into account and not let financial savings for a district result in social, academic, and dispositional costs for children.

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